



TITLE:

<Book Reviews>Robbie Peters. Surabaya, 1945–2010: Neighbourhood, State and Economy in Indonesia's City of Struggle. Singapore: NUS Press, 2013, 272p.

AUTHOR(S):

KUSNO, Abidin

---

CITATION:

KUSNO, Abidin. <Book Reviews>Robbie Peters. Surabaya, 1945–2010: Neighbourhood, State and Economy in Indonesia's City of Struggle. Singapore: NUS Press, 2013, 272p.. Southeast Asian Studies 2013, 2(3): 602-605

ISSUE DATE:

2013-12

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/180018>

RIGHT:

difference. Democracy, like socialism, is not an analytical category, it is a vague ideological preference.

Robert H. Taylor

*Institute of South East Asian Studies (Singapore)*

***Surabaya, 1945–2010: Neighbourhood, State and Economy in Indonesia's City of Struggle***

ROBBIE PETERS

Singapore: NUS Press, 2013, 272 p.

Before moving to Jakarta, I lived in Surabaya as a student from 1982 to 1990. The Surabaya of then was just beginning to represent itself as a world class city with the new landmarks of Tunjungan Plaza and later Delta Plaza, forming a belt of international hotels, offices, and shopping malls around kampung neighborhoods. Little did I realize that the city then was undergoing a major transformation marked by a shift from a city of work to a space of consumption. Robbie Peters came to Surabaya almost a decade later but at a most critical time in the history of the city during the fateful year of 1998. He thus understood especially well how the aftermath of 1998 (and what came before) had triggered a series of unprecedented crises in the forms of *ninja*, terrorism, and urban renewals all of which have profoundly shaped the neighborhood of Dinoyo—the subject of his study.

*Surabaya, 1945–2010* focuses on a kampung where people live a life at the margins of center of the city across different socio-political fields of postcolonial Indonesia. This neighborhood is specific in its proximity to factories and later shopping malls which took advantage of their labor, but the people in the kampung are more informal workers than proletariats. This set the stage for Peters to show the uneven relations between the kampung and the city as a kind of tension-filled duality that represents the larger relation between people and the state. Sometimes it appears we are being offered a choice between seeing Dinoyo surrender to the bureaucratic rationality of the state or stay with their kampung ethos of solidarity. The choice seems clear when outside in the street lurks the world of state power and capitalist modernization.

Consistent with the interest of anthropologists, Peters shows how Dinoyo kampung is given substance of neighborliness through the practices of *slametan* (feast-giving) to observe important events that happen in one's life such as death, marriage, and birth, which at once constitute a sense of solidarity and community. Peters however, does not regard kampung as inherently coherent or harmonious, indeed he believes its formation to be an outgrowth of control and crisis, territoriality and domination against which *slametan* continues to be enacted. This kind of formulation allows politics (rather than culture) to play a significant part in the book. *Surabaya, 1945–2010* is thus,

an anthropological book that goes beyond anthropology, or better yet, it is a book that represents the best side of the discipline. Against the depiction of culture as a timeless way of living, Peters takes seriously the historical dimension of the kampung cultures, making them part of the violence of the national time as he emphasizes social change while identifying key practices that continue to be reproduced for self-definition and self-defense.

The first two chapters already show the coordination of time and space. They introduce Dinoyo within the changing context of Indonesia and see it as a “third” space beyond the confrontation between the city and the village which constitutes the essence of an urban kampung. The story starts from chapter 3 which sets the tone of the book by offering a chilling account of the 1965 purge of the communists and its associated space of kampung. Peters narrates the story (in this and other chapters) through the memories of people he got to know such as Eko, Rukun, Neng, and Arifin to show how Dinoyo is never a coherent space. The politics that culminated in the purge of 1965 did radically change kampung lives. This chapter raises questions of how the terror of 1965 affects the subsequent development of the Dinoyo. What do the inhabitants think about their communities, old and new? In the context of 1965, what do we mean by the subsequent Kampung Improvement Project (KIP)? Is it indeed a “success” story of a pro-poor urban agenda?

Chapter 4 responds to these questions by suggesting that KIP was involved in the “pacification” of the kampung world of Dinoyo in the aftermath of 1965. However, this was not an easy enterprise. There are interesting discussions here about the challenges of collecting data for the project. It details the processes by which the kampung is approached by technologies of measurement, such as maps, statistics, and questionnaires. Peters pays attention to how this technology of abstraction was carried out by civil servants and university researchers who worked from the position of observers, standing outside the kampung. This reveals not only the limits of their methods, but also the sense of gap and otherness as well as a distrust of the kampung residents to government officers due to their memories of the terrifying 1965 purges by the New Order. The KIP was nevertheless accepted eventually when it offered rights to ownership to the occupants of the kampung. However, one would note, as Peters did, that landownership entails the production of a tax-paying “middle class.” It also constitutes a division within the communities of the kampung as landownership produces the discourses of legibility and citizenship. Peters devotes an insightful account of how to secure the neighborhood at the time when the “middle class” house owners in the kampung increasingly feel the threat from the floating mass (*massa*).

In the 1980s, I remember people in Surabaya seem to identify the urban space through the width of the streets. The wide street (where malls, hotels, and government buildings are located) is associated with the image of the city, whereas the alleyways, such as *gang* and *lorong* are seen as the world of kampung. The world of the city and that of the kampung were indeed clearly different but they were not so divided. *Becak* (rickshaw) could then bring people to plazas, and kampung was accessible by any two-wheel vehicle. The two worlds constituted each other beyond

the physical environment. There were social economic ties as well even though this was marked by uneven relations. In chapter 5, Peters makes it clear how the move from factories to malls to symbolize national urban progress was supported by *kampung* which provided inexpensive accommodations for sales girls working in the mall. The *kampung* not only contributed to the development of the city, but it also watched the rise and the fall of those who engaged with the city. Peters nicely describes this process by which the malls, the hotels, and the entertainment districts came to symbolize not so much the idea of progress, but the illegitimacy of the state and the crisis of society as the New Order began to crumble at the end of the 1990s.

Chapter 6 shows the impact of monetary crisis (*krismon*) in the 1990s and how it affected the material conditions of the Dinoyo neighborhood. The focus of this chapter however is on how people survived that difficult time; how different enterprises were created to cope with the time of crisis. The people of Dinoyo intensified and diversified their existing informal networks by doing what they could to generate income, from setting up coffee stalls to riverside service enterprises. The best part of this chapter is the discussion on how cultures were reinvented to live through tough times, from pigeon racing to betting on soccer games to prostitution, and how these different activities were received by the authorities which sought to control them.

The effects of crisis produced uncanny happenings. Chapter 7 deals with the infamous stories of Ninja terror that for a while, saw East Java become a spectacle for a global media. Peters argues that the hysteria over the attack and killing of ninja is best understood as a “metaphor for anonymous incursions,” a kind of defensive response to an uncertain condition of life that occurred when the source of power that used to inhabit the neighborhood suddenly became unclear and subjected to misappropriation by unlocatable forces during the economic and political crises. There is a shadow of Foucauldian analysis in this chapter. The self-defense of the community began with the perception of one’s own self that needed clarification by way of imagining the incursion of “outsiders” whose identities were hard to locate. These others (the insane, the ninja, the informant, and even the police officer) constituted profound anxieties in the community and yet they were perversely instrumental for the community to regain its self-hood. At the time of political transition, it wasn’t clear to members of the neighborhood, as to Peters, if they themselves were the living dead of the spectral New Order state.

Chapter 8 shows how social life in the *kampung* in the Post-Suharto era is virtually uncontrollable by the state. The key component in the “art of not being governed” (to use James Scott’s term) is the ritual of *slametan*. The enactment of this inclusive tradition serves to recognize both residents and non-residents, and they thus counter the exclusionary practice of residential cards. The “being there” constitutes a community beyond the official recognition of IDs. The focus of this chapter thus is the formation of collective identity and the role of alleyway as an almost organic social space that helps bring people together. Peters examines in detail the use of the alleyway in the event of a death, and shows how people in Dinoyo master the alley. The focus on the alley

allows Peters to discuss how people in Dinoyo act on the street, the counter-space of alley, which is considered as a domain of the outside world marked by domination and conflict (with authorities and upper middle class).

Chapter 9 concerns the present challenge of Dinoyo. Peters discusses some of the most recent attempts by the municipality of Surabaya to rebuild itself after the “time of insanity,” but in this last chapter Peters shows how the New Order’s techniques of capitalist modernization continue well into the post-Suharto era, as if time had never changed or in fact gotten worse for the *kampung* folks of Dinoyo. In the present era of *reformasi*, when the notion of *rakyat* (people) has become the keyword for political legitimacy, the folks of Dinoyo continue to be marginalized. This however does not mean that people in Dinoyo are just victims of urban renewal. In the last section on “Sovereignty and Slametan” Peters nicely brings back the ritual of *Slametan* for a wedding that enacts social identity to reproduce the agency of Dinoyo’s residents. This *Slametan* defies submission to state registration.

In the end, after reading the conclusion, we realize that what made Dinoyo possible and held itself together is not merely the power of culture (such as that of *Slametan*), but also politics, or political bargaining. Peters approaches Dinoyo slowly and attentively to reveal the capacity of people in living their daily lives. *Surabaya 1945–2000* is an excellent book represented in an engaging narrative via life stories of the *kampung* people. It is also a book attentive to scholarship. Peters pays homage to earlier anthropological studies of Indonesian *kampungs*, following their paths and themes while engaging critically with their findings. Robbie continues this great tradition of studying *kampung*, making sense of the people’s lives and the changes they experienced, but he does it in a way that makes us aware of the politics of the city and the nation. We learn from his study that the new time of *reformasi* is nothing other than an extension of the past New Order. At least this is what is seen from the margin. From the *kampung*, Peters offers a fascinating study of a neighborhood undergoing a time of insanity when the future is uncertain and the past is carried over to blur the present.

Abidin Kusno

*Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia*

***The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War: In Cooperation with the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation***

PETER POST, WILLIAM H. FREDERICK, IRIS HEIDEBRINK, and SHIGERU SATO, eds.  
Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2010, xxix+684 p.

The twentieth century has been characterized as the century of wars. It experienced two world